

Frequently Asked Questions about the Advance Mills Bridge Project

When will the bridge be completed?

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is committed to an accelerated schedule for this project that calls for the bridge to be completed and open to traffic in the fall of 2009 or, at the latest, the spring of 2010.

Why did VDOT decide not to place a temporary bridge across the river?

When questions arose concerning the process for installing the temporary bridge, VDOT immediately began to seek alternatives to mitigate those concerns. During this review we found that by reducing the scope (affected area) of the project the permanent bridge could be completed approximately two years earlier than originally estimated. That can be accomplished by placing the replacement bridge in the same location as the existing bridge and where the temporary bridge was planned. Since the temporary bridge would be removed when construction starts, it might be in place for six months or less before the river crossing would be closed again. The accelerated project will also save an estimated \$2 million compared with the original plan for a temporary and permanent replacement bridge.

Why can't the temporary bridge be placed at a different location?

If the temporary bridge is placed anywhere other than on the existing bridge foundations it would require additional right of way and similar environmental reviews as the permanent replacement project. That would have substantially delayed placement of the temporary bridge and made it a less effective option.

What are environmental reviews and why are they required?

All projects built with federal funds require a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review. NEPA requires the examination and avoidance of potential impacts to the social and natural environment when considering approval of proposed transportation projects. In addition to evaluating the potential environmental effects, the transportation needs of the public must also be taken into account in reaching a decision that is in the best overall public interest.

Any time VDOT does construction work next to a river, environmental water quality permits are required by law. There are stringent state and federal regulations that require the river, its habitat and the plants and animals in it not be harmed by the work, or that VDOT mitigate any environmental disturbance that occurs. The reviews ensure that the project is designed and built with minimal effects to the environment in and around the river.

In the case of Advance Mills, because the project is within a designated historic district there are cultural and historic reviews that must also be done. These reviews document the cultural and historic resources in the area and help VDOT to build the project with as little impact as possible to those resources.

How long will those reviews take? Will they delay the project?

VDOT anticipates completion of the NEPA documents by June 2008. Those reviews will not delay the project since the engineering and survey work is continuing while the reviews are completed.

Will the money for the bridge be available when it is needed?

VDOT is committed to building this replacement bridge as quickly as possible. The funds for the project have been programmed and will be available when they are needed.

What about the federal contribution? Will that be available when it is needed for construction?

The project is designated as a federal-aid project, meaning that 80 percent of the cost will be paid by the federal government. That federal funding is a reimbursement of state funds spent for the project. The federal funding will come from Virginia's federal obligation, which is the reimbursement by the federal government for money spent by the state for transportation projects. In this case the federal contribution comes from a fund dedicated to the repair, rehabilitation and replacement of bridges in Virginia.

Why can't the existing Advance Mills Bridge be repaired?

The bridge suffers from extensive deterioration of the steel girders, trusses and other members that support the bridge. The supporting piers and abutments are also deteriorated. This deterioration is to be expected in a bridge of its age. While repair of the bridge is technically possible, so much of the structure would have to be replaced that it would lose any historic integrity and the bridge would likely continue to be restricted, meaning that heavy vehicles such as fire trucks and commercial trucks could not use it.

Is a steel truss bridge the only option?

No. VDOT has proposed that design because the use of a prefabricated steel truss bridge will allow the project to be completed somewhat quicker than if the bridge is built onsite and will reflect the historic character of the existing bridge. But the final design will not be selected until after public comment is received at the public hearing this summer. The range of completion dates, from fall 2009 to spring 2010, allows for the additional time necessary should another design be selected.

Will the new bridge be pedestrian and bike-friendly?

The bridge will be designed with a wide shoulder that will allow room for walkers and bikers.

What improvements are planned on Durrett Ridge Road?

VDOT will perform heavy maintenance on that road to improve the surface and increase safety for those using the road. The surface of the gravel road will be stabilized with a tar and gravel mix and VDOT will work within the right of way to clear brush and improve sight distance on the curves. The deck of the bridge across Swift Run will be replaced with a new deck that will allow legal loads and include side railings.

What are the next steps?

VDOT is working to complete the environmental and cultural resource reviews. Engineering is under way to design alternatives for the new bridge. Those alternatives will be presented at a public hearing scheduled for this summer. VDOT's right-of-way section is in the process of identifying all right-of-way impacts and the easements that will be needed for utility relocation.

What can the community do?

Stay engaged in the process. If you have questions, comments or suggestions for additional information that VDOT could provide on this page, please e-mail AdvanceMills@VDOT.Virginia.gov or contact Allan Sumpter, Residency Administrator in Charlottesville. He can be reached at (434) 293-0011, or by e-mail at Allan.Sumpter@VDOT.Virginia.gov.

Your early involvement through e-mails and phone calls will help ensure the project is developed in a way that meets your community's needs. As work on the project continues and as additional questions come in to VDOT we will update this site to ensure that everyone has access to the same information.